

**ASSEMBLY BILL**

**No. 2574**

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**Introduced by Assembly Member Chávez**

February 19, 2016

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An act to add Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 1168) to Part 3.5 of Division 2 of the Labor Code, relating to veterans.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2574, as introduced, Chávez. Veteran farmers and ranchers.

Existing law establishes the Labor and Workforce Development Agency and provides that the agency consists of, among other entities, the California Workforce Investment Board, the Employment Development Department, and the Employment Training Panel. Existing law establishes within state government a Department of Veterans Affairs. Existing law provides for a variety of state benefits to veterans, including those relating to educational assistance and farm and home purchases, as specified.

This bill would require the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, in partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs, to consult with other state agencies, including, but not limited to, the Employment Development Department, to mutually explore, in consultation with the United States Department of Agriculture, the potential availability of existing state employment training, outreach, and business development resources and other public or private sector resources, as specified, for purposes of identifying and leveraging federal veteran farmer or rancher as defined, assistance programs and resources as contained in a certain federal law. The bill would also set forth related findings and declarations of the Legislature.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.  
State-mandated local program: no.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

SECTION 1. Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 1168) is added to Part 3.5 of Division 2 of the Labor Code, to read:

CHAPTER 9. VETERAN FARMERS OR RANCHERS

1168. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) The United States Census Bureau data for 2015 estimates an approximate global population totaling 7.25 billion people, requiring increased capacity to provide an adequate food supply while global resources for producing food are dwindling.

(b) The average age of farmers across the United States is on the rise. In 1978 16.4 percent of principal farm operators were over 65 years of age and by 2012 it increased to 33 percent of principal farm operators being over 65 years of age.

(c) An 8-percent national decrease in the number of farmers and ranchers is expected to occur between the years 2008 and 2018.

(d) The current social and educational infrastructure is inadequate to serve the needs of farmers and ranchers in California and elsewhere.

(e) According to the 2012 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture, 22 percent of all farmers were beginning farmers in 2012, with minority and historically underrepresented communities constituting part of the continued growth among new and beginning farmers and ranchers.

(f) There is expanding recognition of new populations considering enterprises in farming and ranching that require a repositioning of classrooms and targeted educational resources outreach.

(g) According to the USDA, the sales value generated by California agriculture increased by 4.6 percent between the 2012 and 2013 crop years. The state's 77,900 farms and ranches received forty-six billion four hundred million dollars (\$46,400,000,000) for their outputs, ranking California as the nation's largest in cash receipts, with the next leading states being Iowa and Nebraska.

1 (h) In response to the need to identify new population segments  
2 entering farming and farm-related fields, the federal 2014 United  
3 States farm bill, known as the federal Agricultural Act of 2014  
4 (Public Law 113-79), contained various landmark incentives to  
5 assist America's veterans returning from military service to acquire  
6 skills needed to start and manage a farm and successfully enter  
7 the business of farming and ranching. Incentives include, but are  
8 not limited to, education and training, technical assistance, and  
9 eligibility for USDA Microloans offering a simplified application  
10 process and favorable interest rates.

11 (i) More than six million veterans reside in rural America and  
12 two million veterans are residents of California.

13 1168.1. It is the intent of the Legislature that this chapter  
14 accomplish both of the following:

15 (a) Recognizes the opportunities provided to California's two  
16 million veterans made available through landmark federal funding  
17 and technical support for veteran farmers and ranchers through  
18 the federal Agricultural Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-79).

19 (b) Acknowledges further opportunities offered through state  
20 and federal partnership to enhance the benefits to California's  
21 veterans resulting from the provisions of the Agricultural Act of  
22 2014.

23 1168.2. For purposes of this chapter, "veteran farmer or  
24 rancher" means a farmer or rancher who meets both of the  
25 following:

26 (a) Has not operated a farm or ranch or has not operated a farm  
27 or ranch for more than 10 years.

28 (b) Has served in the Armed Forces of the United States  
29 including the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard  
30 of the United States, Reserves, Army National Guard, and Air  
31 National Guard.

32 1168.3. (a) The Labor and Workforce Development Agency  
33 shall, in partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs,  
34 consult with other state agencies, including, but not limited to, the  
35 Employment Development Department, the Employment Training  
36 Panel, the California Workforce Development Board, and the State  
37 Board of Food and Agriculture, to mutually explore, in consultation  
38 with the United States Department of Agriculture, the potential  
39 availability of existing state employment training, outreach, and  
40 business development resources for purposes of identifying and

1 leveraging federal veteran farmer assistance programs and  
2 resources as contained in the federal Agricultural Act of 2014  
3 (Public Law 113-79).

4 (b) Resources identified shall be designed to assist the state's  
5 eligible organizations serving veterans or veteran applicants  
6 applying and qualifying for federal funding through the federal  
7 Agricultural Act of 2014.

8 (c) Other public or private sector resources offering guaranteed  
9 loans or other support for new veteran farmers or ranchers to assist  
10 in meeting their needs, including, but not limited to, farm  
11 ownership, operating loans, loans for land acquisition and  
12 improvement, and farm storage facilities, may also be identified,  
13 as appropriate, to support eligible organizations serving veterans  
14 or veteran applicants applying and qualifying for federal funding  
15 through the federal Agricultural Act of 2014.